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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOMMENDS GETTING
TESTED FOR STDs**

April is National STD Awareness Month

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Nearly 19 million new sexually transmitted disease (STD) infections occur nationally each year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will join organizations across the nation during National STD Awareness Month to increase awareness of STDs, and their transmission, prevention and treatment.

STDs are a group of diseases that are spread from person-to-person through sexual activity. Germs that cause STDs can spread during oral, anal or vaginal sex. When left untreated, some STDs can cause serious long-term health problems.

“Sexually transmitted diseases are preventable, and many are easily treated and cured,” said Casey W. Riley, director of VDH’s Division of Disease Prevention. “National STD Awareness Month should motivate anyone who is sexually active to protect their health by learning more about STDs and getting tested.”

According to CDC, individuals who are infected with STDs are two to five times more likely than uninfected individuals to acquire HIV through sexual contact. Chlamydia, which can cause serious reproductive damage including infertility, remains the most commonly reported STD in the United States and Virginia. In 2005, there were 22,633 cases of chlamydia reported in Virginia, compared to 21,635 in 2004. Gonorrhea, another STD that can cause serious health effects including infertility, is also commonly reported in Virginia. In 2005, there were 8,345 cases of gonorrhea reported statewide, compared to 8,565 in 2004.

The VDH Division of Disease Prevention provides HIV and STD education and prevention throughout the state. It offers confidential counseling and referral services through its HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis Hotline. The Division supports HIV/STD testing and partner counseling, and provides medications for the treatment of Virginians living with HIV/AIDS. Diagnosis and treatment of STD infections is available in all local health departments. Services are free and confidential.

For more information on STDs and HIV/AIDS, contact the Virginia HIV/STD/Viral Hepatitis Hotline at (800) 533-4148. The hotline is staffed by trained counselors who provide crisis intervention, referrals and written educational materials on STDs and HIV/AIDS. For additional information, visit the Division’s Web site at www.vdh.virginia.gov/std.

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